

Members Follow Prophetic Counsel in Holding Day of Service

By **Melissa Merrill**

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In April 2011, President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, announced that units of the Church everywhere would be invited to participate in a day of service to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Church welfare program, an invitation that officially came in a First Presidency letter sent to all units. President Eyring then shared four principles that he said have guided him when he “wanted to help in the Lord’s way” and when he has been helped by others (see “Opportunities to Do Good,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2011, 22).

In the remaining months of 2011, members across the world responded to that prophetic call, in the process embodying the principles President Eyring outlined.

Principle 1: “All people are happier and feel more self-respect when they can provide for themselves and their family and then reach out to take care of others.”

Among the first stakes to respond to the First Presidency’s invitation to participate in a day of service was the David stake in Panama, which organized a preparedness fair for the broader community. The event, which took place in April, was supported by several public entities and featured workshops and demonstrations on topics related to home storage, family finances, emergency preparedness, and health.

It isn’t enough just to know these principles for ourselves, said Itzel Valdez Gonzalez, who participated in the day of service. It’s also important to serve others by sharing them.

“Service to others is an important characteristic of the followers of Jesus Christ,” she said. “This

event provided opportunities for members of the Church to give of their time and talents to bless those in need.”

Principle 2: “When we join hands to serve people in need, the Lord unites our hearts.”

Members of the Arusha Branch in Tanzania decided to volunteer at Shanga House, a facility that gives vocational training to people with disabilities and teaches them to provide a living for themselves and their families.

On August 20, 2011, 35 participants—adults, youth, and children; Church members, investigators, and missionaries—worked alongside people with disabilities in making craft items and jewelry that would later be sold. The volunteers also helped with household chores like cleaning and sweeping.

Just before the group departed, Shanga House coordinators asked them to come to a central area so that the people they had served could shake their hands and thank them. “It was quite an emotional experience,” said Sister Sandra Rydalch, who is serving a mission in the area with her husband, Elder Rich Rydalch. Since that time, when people from Shanga House see members of the branch downtown, “they readily recognize us, wave, and stop to visit,” Sister Rydalch said.

Patience Rwiza, who organized the branch’s project under the direction of priesthood leadership, points out that the activity was beneficial not just for those at Shanga House but also for those who offered the service. “People developed a sense of love by helping others, and along the process, people learned things from

the community that they didn't know before," he said. "My testimony has been strengthened with what I did and saw—from the members' participation and the community as a whole."

Principle 3: "Draw your family into the work with you so that they can learn to care for each other as they care for others."

Members of the Coimbra Portugal Stake realize that service is not a one-time event. In fact, the stake participates in several activities each year under the Mormon Helping Hands umbrella. Last year's activities included cleaning a public park and taking Primary children to visit other children who were living in an orphanage. In these and other activities, it is important to involve whole families, said Anabela Jordão Ferreira, who serves as the public affairs director for the Coimbra stake.

"In our projects, we sometimes say that we accept people from 8 months old to 88 years old," said Sister Jordão. "That is completely true. We see mothers with babies and grandfathers who have mobility difficulties, but they also have a strong testimony and the will to serve the Lord."

Principle 4: "The Lord sends the Holy Ghost to make it possible to 'seek, and ye shall find' in caring for the poor as He does in finding truth."

When Michael Hatch, who serves on the high council in the Farmington New Mexico Stake, was given the assignment to organize a stake day of service in response to President Eyring's invitation, he wondered where they would find ideas for ministering to the poor in their community. He met in council with his committee, and they and other stake leaders encouraged stake members to share their ideas relating to needs in the community.

Roberta Rogers knew of a particular need among several organizations in the



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area—including the hospital where she works in community relations. While clothing drives usually generated helpful donations of used pants, shirts, shoes, and coats, what many charities still needed were things like socks, underwear, and pajamas—donations that needed to come new. Sister Rogers suggested that the stake organize a collection of such items.

On October 15, stake members distributed in their neighborhoods 1,000 cardstock door hangers that explained the project, invited the community to participate, and listed items needed. A week later stake members returned to collect the items and then brought them to the stake center for sorting and distribution among 10 local charitable organizations.

That combined effort met an urgent need in their community, Sister Rogers said. "It was something different, and it helped people. And because it was not really expensive, one family could spend a few dollars and really be able to help somebody." ■

Members around the world have participated in service to their communities in response to the First Presidency's invitation.